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Honourable Mention

A Manifestation of Total Freedom: Anarchy and its Viability as an Ideology

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Open Education Statement:

Open education, quite simply, is the future. As human society increases in complexity, and the intellectual demands on its constituents likewise rise commensurately, there is nothing more important than access to knowledge and the means of self enrichment for the thriving of both individuals and society. As such, I consider open and decentralized scholarship to be the cornerstone of the next evolution of education. It expands the resources available to the general population to take control of their own faculties and expand their potential in ways that our present system is too rigid, inaccessible, and dogmatic to accomplish. In doing so it shifts the center of intellectual activity from static and status based institutions that are segregated from society at large, and allows knowledge and ideas to be formed within social contexts, tested by their members, and refined with a practical purpose always in view. Thus I am proud and pleased to have the chance to contribute in some small way to this critical endeavor, and hope that my contribution merits inclusion.

**A Manifestation of Total Freedom:
Anarchism and it's Viability as an Ideology**

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Class: POLI 1160

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Anarchism represents a unique challenge for ideological appraisal: often considered utopian and idealistic at best, and dangerous nonsense at worst, it is rarely afforded serious consideration as a viable ideology. However, history has shown multiple examples of anarchistic systems put into place, and the core principles of individual exercising of political liberty, and devolution of power to the level of direct communal control have found both practical applications and increasing societal support around the world. As such, not only have the previous detractions against anarchism failed to invalidate it as a fully viable ideology, but anarchism stands unique among contemporary ideologies as a fundamental departure from the paradigm of statism that all others rest on; and thus represents a bold new course for an entirely new class of democratic political theory and philosophy to develop from.

In order to fully understand the merits of anarchism, we must abandon a fundamental error in appraising its history; and in doing so reveal one of its principle strengths. The error being that the alleged historical ‘failure’ of anarchism to maintain an effective state proves that it is a nonviable ideology. Instead, the emergence and resilience of anarchism in some of the most turbulent periods of history is proof rather of its profound adaptability. During the Mexican and Russian revolutions, anarchists would play decisive roles.¹ In particular, the Ukrainian Makhnovshchina movement under Nestor Makhno would succeed in operating an autonomous anarcho-syndicalist state, maintaining exceptionally efficient services and communications given the conditions in which it operated, while contending with both Red and White armies on their frontier.² Despite Makhno’s ultimate defeat in the Russian Civil War, his followers would go on to prove a continuous thorn in the side of Soviet authorities into the mid 1920’s, organizing strikes,

¹ Eric R Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1969), 22, 99.

² *ibid.* 94-96.

radicalizing youths, and attempting to undo what they saw as a subversion of the revolution.³ Similar cases occurred throughout the Spanish civil war, with anarchist factions across the country resisting calls for a hegemonic front at the cost of their principles.⁴ More recently, modern anarchism has manifested both theoretically and practically in numerous forms. From engagement with formal politics and welfare state mechanisms⁵, to collectives emerging as local responses to war in Afghanistan and Africa,⁶ to intellectual challenges to the economic and political organizations of the globalized world,⁷ there is no doubt that anarchists have and continue to join enthusiastically in ideological contests regardless of outcome. Though while anarchism demonstrates extraordinary resilience compared to conventional ideologies, its break from its contemporaries rests on its complete departure from the basic structure of political thinking.

Anarchism breaks from the assumptions of what is ‘required’ for effective political organization by placing the individual at the centre of all political considerations. While other ideologies treat the individual either as a participatory element in a larger impersonal machine⁸, or as dangerous to the optimal functioning of human society if left unrestrained,⁹ anarchism contends that any separation of power from the individual devaluates that person's contribution to the polit-

³ Savchenko, Viktor. “The Anarchist Movement in Ukraine at the Height of the New Economic Policy (1924-1925).” *East/West Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 4, no. 2, (2017): 174-177, 179, 184.

⁴ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican Books Ltd, 1986), 406.

⁵ Matthew S. Adams and Nathan J. Jun. “Political Theory and History: The Case of Anarchism.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20, no. 3 (2015): 245, 248; Benjamin J. Pauli, “A New Anarchism in Britain and the US: Towards a Richer Understanding of Post-War Anarchist Thought.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20, no. 2, (2015): 141-142, 144-145.

⁶ Jennifer Murtazashvili, “A Tired Cliché: Why We Should Stop Worrying About Ungoverned Spaces and Embrace Self-Governance.” *Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2, (2018): 13-14.

⁷ Benjamin Franks, “Anarchism and Business Ethics: The Social Responsibility of the Anarchist is to Destroy Business.” *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 14, no. 4, (2014): 714-716, 720-721.

⁸ Lucien Van der Walt, “Back to the Future: Revival, Relevance and Route of an Anarchist/ Syndicalist Approach for Twenty-first Century Left, Labour, and National Liberation Movements.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 34, no.3, (2016): 353-354.

⁹ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, the State, and Utopia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc, 1974), 33-35.

ical landscape. As such, all political structures that do exist must enable the individual to exercise power equivalent to other members of society. As demonstrated in modern conflict zones, the most resilient form of organization remains the localized communities of individuals.¹⁰ Both historically and ideologically, anarchist societies have stressed the necessity of democratic participation and egalitarian mechanisms of control of any representative for the collective, by the collective.¹¹ This has led to criticism that anarchism invests too much power in the individual, and that either the society will simply be dissolved by competing individuals¹², or else collectively replace it with another, more stable framework.¹³ However, anarchists argue that this is impossible precisely because the break from the traditional paradigm required by anarchism is a total one.¹⁴ This relocation of the locus of power from an abstract institution to the individuals that compose society, does not however change the communal context of the individual. In fact, by recognition of the individuality of those we share society with, we become aware of our fundamental responsibility towards the maintenance of society for the benefit of all its members.¹⁵ Peter Kropotkin similarly regarded anarchism as the rejection of community by dictation, and that the recognition of human capacity for adaptive socialization was the key to the reorientation of society through individuals recognizing their interests in each others wellbeing.¹⁶ Instead of fearing or seeking to exploit the capacities of individuals, anarchism fully embraces the capacity of self determination of the individual as the strongest foundation for social organization. This

¹⁰ Murtazashvili. 21-23.

¹¹ Angela Wigger and Hubert Buch-Hansen, "Competition, the Global Crisis, and Alternatives to Neoliberal Capitalism: A Critical Engagement with Anarchism." *New Political Science* 35, no. 4, (2013): 624.

¹² Nozick. 51-52.

¹³ Van der Walt. 357.

¹⁴ The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*. (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009), 16-17, 23.

¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*. (York, UK: Methuen, 2013), 32-34.

¹⁶ Peter Kropotkin, *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, ed. Roger N. Baldwin (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1970), 206, 209, 217-218.

further emphasizes the paradigmatic nature of the division between anarchism and other contemporary ideologies: where representative and authoritarian societies are designed with an inherent mistrust of their constituent members, anarchists allow society to freely reflect their constituents for better and worse.

This principle of people as both the basic means and ends of society is critical to understanding and appreciating the anarchist approach to organization. It is also important to understand that organization, or ‘community’, takes the place of the ‘state’ used in other ideologies. Saul Alinsky, emphasizes that means and ends are only useful when directed towards an immediate concern and action, and that a favoured tactic of subtle statist repression is the invoking of universal morality to invalidate ‘unsavoury’ means of addressing real abuses of power.¹⁷ Modern anarchists echo this sentiment, calling for radical breaks from any institution that impedes direct action through bureaucratic or ‘civil’ inertia, no matter its progressive history.¹⁸ This is most often the point at which the statist criticism that anarchism is thus incapable of any sophisticated organization is voiced, and that, as Robert Nozick asserts that a minimum state is a moral necessity to protect freedoms against the risk of violence.¹⁹ However, this ignores both the historical examples discussed above, and what could be considered ‘localized anarchism’ within current hierarchical frameworks. The Cuban response to the 1990’s economic crisis, and the emergence of organopónico collective farms operating parallel to state control and markets represents a socialist example of direct community organization consistent with anarchist principles of solutions from the ground up.²⁰ Similarly, revitalized and community supported farming is a growing

¹⁷ Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York NY: Random House Inc, 1971), 24-26.

¹⁸ The Invisible Committee. 101-102.

¹⁹ Nozick. 52.

²⁰ Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company Ltd, 2007), 70-74.

practice in both rural and urban America, particularly in economically devastated Detroit demonstrates a localized shift in mentality towards both community and the purpose of production.²¹ This is due to the often unconscious internalization of the anarchist principle of organization for localized prosperity. Re-localization of both social and economic institutions brings them directly under the jurisdiction of those both creating, and benefitting from their existence.²² This internalization also addresses the spurious notion that anarchism is an amoral ideology due to its lack of compulsive law.²³ Kropotkin emphasized that the only adequate protection for morality from both lawlessness and hierarchical despotism is the internalization of these functions within the individual; but unlike the atomistic view of the self implied by other ideologies, the realization of individual freedom engenders a “complete and profound responsibility”²⁴ towards humanity.²⁵ Thus the combination of radical refocusing of political power in the individual, and the redefinition of political organization from the state to community, affords anarchism a far more important place in the ideological pantheon than a ‘contender’ among its contemporary peers.

Anarchism represents a radical departure from the assumptions that underpin all other ideologies currently adopted; which both explains its poor treatment in popular and academic appraisals, and demands that it be considered as the basis for a fundamentally different type of ideology. Much like democracy, or at least the ‘state’ as an entity that exists above and separate from the constituents of a society, anarchism’s radical redefinition of both the individual and the state are sufficient to necessitate it be evaluated as a paradigmatic ideology separate from those

²¹ *ibid.* 81-83.

²² Wigger and Buch-Hansen, 621, 623-624.

²³ Nozick. 51-53.

²⁴ Sartre. 33.

²⁵ Kropotkin. 196-197.

premised on a statist axiom. This paradigmatic view is also the only way to accommodate the variety of manifestations of anarchism from socialist,²⁶ to centrist or conservative.²⁷ Attempts to hybridize anarchism to ideologies such as traditional conservatism are invariably undone by the inability to reconcile the fundamental differences between the statist and stateless paradigms that underlie these separate ideologies.²⁸ This is because anarchism as a basic set of principles regarding the individual and the organization of individuals with full determining power, can only be partially reconciled with a hierarchical system or administration that curtails the basic freedoms, and therefore responsibilities of the individual; and despite several examples above demonstrating anarchistic organizational principles, they are none the less curtailed in their development by both external state constraints, and the internalization of these constraints on the part of the individual. Thus while the ideological basis of anarchism and the anarchistic paradigm does indeed have substantial evidence to support its viability, the only conclusive test is a full application of stateless organization, of which we have yet to see beyond isolated historical examples.

It is not an exaggeration to say that anarchism is seen as the most dangerous form of modern ideology, and that this is partly due to its ‘alien’ qualities in comparison to other ideologies. Its historical resilience and ability to adapt and flourish in the harshest environments, combined with its seemingly naive trust in the individual as a political actor, and organic community as an effective method of organization have been difficult to account for based on conventional metrics for assessing ideologies. However, when these qualities are understood as a difference of kind, rather than one of degree in fundamental principles relative to other ideologies, anarchism

²⁶ Van der Walt. 351; Kropotkin. 56-57.

²⁷ Noam Chomsky, *On Anarchism* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2013), 24-27; Adams and Jun. 245-247

²⁸ Benjamin Franks, “Ideological Hybrids: The Contrary Case of Tory Anarchism.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21 no. 2, (2016): 173-175.

becomes a strange-yet-comprehensible beast. At its core, anarchism is a rejection of the assumption that humans must be checked by impersonal institutions to reach their personal and collective potential, and that regardless of the particulars of a given community or method, the individual truly empowered in their capacity towards freedom will not forsake their fellows.

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